

#173 JIM GREEN: USS *ARIZONA*

Chris Conybeare (CC): . . . just look at me and . . .

Jim Green (JG): Can't you pull that jack on the phone there?

CC: Nah, it's wired into the wall, unfortunately. And we'll just try to ignore all the rest of this. I think we'll get along real well.

This is an oral history interview with Jim Green, conducted December 4, 1986 at the Sheraton Waikiki in Honolulu. It's approximately 9:45 AM. Mr. Green lives in Troy, Michigan. My name is Chris Conybeare and I'm being assisted in the interview by Mark Tanaka-Sanders.

Mr. Green, we start these interviews with everybody the same way. Could you state your name and rank on December 7, 1941?

JG: Jim Green, Gunner's Mate Third Class.

CC: And where were you stationed?

JG: I stationed turret four.

CC: Of?

JG: On the USS *ARIZONA*.

CC: You were on --- let's go back a little bit first. How did you get on the *ARIZONA*? Had you been there long or what was your . . .

JG: No, I went aboard in 1940, August of 1940. I joined the Navy in 1940, March, and went to -- I requested the *ARIZONA*. I had a preference of aircraft carrier, battleship, or destroyer, and I took the *ARIZONA*.

CC: And how old were you?

JG: I was eighteen at that time.

CC: Still wet behind the ears?

JG: Yeah, still wet. Good kid too, though. Didn't smoke either.

CC: That morning, December 7, 1941, where were you and what were you doing, and how did you learn that you were under attack?

JG: I had the twelve to four magazine watch, and it was Sunday morning, we were allowed to sleep in. And I was a third class gunner's mate and I was allowed to sleep in the lower hamming room on a cot and a mattress. And as I was sitting on the couch, waiting, I just woke up, and three guys come running through the door saying we're being attacked by the Japs. And the crew down there, they said, "Well, you're full of baloney," words to that effect. We didn't believe it.

And shortly after that, the ship was hit by a bomb and the P.A. system, "Man your battle stations," and then I climbed a ladder to my battle station, which is on the left gun. I was a trade man.

CC: And where was that gun, on the ship, where was it located?

JG: In turret four.

CC: Turret four?

JG: Fourteen-inch turret gun.

CC: What was going on? What was going on around you? Did you get a chance to see anything or . . .

JG: Well, during the attack?

CC: Yeah.

JG: Well, you could look out the ports, for training and elevate the guns, and we'd take turns looking up and we see the planes buzz by and machine gunning. We see a bomb hit the ship, in the background.

CC: Now, you say a bomb hit the ship. What was that like? What . . .

JG: You mean when it hit the *ARIZONA*?

CC: Yeah.

JG: Well, you could feel that the ship would shudder. You could feel it. And after the seventh bomb, I think I wrote down there that the communications went out, and the lights went out.

CC: Then what happened?

JG: Then the men in the lower hamming room were starting to come up into the gun booth 'cause the, the lower hamming room was flooding. Water was coming in.

CC: And how many of 'em were able to come up?

JG: Well, everybody in the lower hamming room come up, but it got pretty crowded in the gun booth.

CC: At what time did you realize that the, the ship was sinking?

JG: We didn't realize the ship was sinking until we were told to go out on topside. Officer of the deck inside the -- and officer of the turret -- he went outside to see what was going on and he was told to come out of the turret by [*Lieutenant*] Commander Fuqua. He was the senior officer in charge that day, because the captain was killed. And the crew left their turret and we started putting the wounded into the boats and life rafts. And meantime, we're still being machine gunned, and they were still dropping bombs.

CC: Now, you're nineteen years old, and as you say, a little still wet behind the ears and all of a sudden you're in the middle of war and people are getting killed and wounded around you. How did you feel at that time?

JG: Well, I went aboard the *TENNESSEE* and we had to take the ammunition out of it because it was flooded. And during the break there and guys were smoking cigarettes and being that I didn't smoke, that's when I started smoking. I was scared to death. Somebody'd drop something, we'd jump and take off and we didn't know where we was running to. We were scared.

CC: And how did you get to the *TENNESSEE*? How did that happen?

JG: Well, I went to Ford Island, as I said, I was going to Ford Island and being a gunner's mate, then they flooded the magazines and so I went aboard and helped take the ammunition out.

CC: Okay. Now, when you left the *ARIZONA*, you just jumped and swam?

JG: Yeah, I swam to one of the keys where we were tied to, and I rested there for four or five minutes, then I swam to Ford Island.

CC: What was the condition of the water? What -- was there oil and fire, or what?

JG: Well, where I got out, where I swam to, there was no oil. But forward of that, the water was on fire. And that oil, when I swam to Ford Island, the corpsmen cleansed my eyes out. (Mumbles)

CC: And did you see other ship mates trying to swim or . . .

JG: Oh, there was several of us trying to swim over.

CC: So, could you try to stick together, or did you . . .

JG: No, I think we was all, one for one by then, look after himself.

CC: And, okay, so you go over to the *TENNESSEE*. Did somebody put you into, press you into new service? I mean, how did you get involved with that action? They told you, assigned you there, or somebody gave you orders, or what happened when you got to Ford Island?

JG: When I went aboard the *TENNESSEE* I got . . . the officer in charge of the turret area, he told me to go down below and take out the ammunition, help carry out the ammunition.

CC: What time was that about?

JG: About ten o'clock in the morning.

CC: So the attack was just . . .

JG: Just barely over.

CC: Of course, you didn't know . . .

JG: I didn't know.

CC: You didn't know what was going to happen next.

JG: No.

CC: How about that evening and later on, when did you realize how many of your shipmates had been lost? At what point did you know how bad it was?

JG: Oh, I didn't know actually how many men were lost 'til the next day, 'cause I was aboard the *TENNESSEE* for two days. And then I got transferred to the receiving station and that's when I found out that that many men were lost.

CC: How'd that hit you?

JG: Well, it was quite a jolt. At that time, I lost a lot of my buddies, in fact twenty-eight from the state of Michigan were aboard that ship. And six guys that went through camp, they lost their lives that day.

CC: What'd that make you think about?

JG: What do you mean, what did it make me think about?

CC: Well, when you realized just how bad it was, do you remember how you felt or what kinds of things you were thinking?

JG: Well, just like everything else, we was mad, we're gonna go for revenge.

CC: So what happened next? Did you --- what was your next assignment?

JG: Well, I was assigned to ordnance salvage, that's where I repair guns and they put on a board, they wanted a man who lived aboard a ship to volunteer as a diver. So that's when I had a buddy, we volunteered as a diver, we knew how to -- I'd gone down there for sixteen months, I knew how to get around pretty well. Easier, it'd be easier for me to get around than try to go by a blueprint.

CC: And then they trained you in the diving?

JG: I went aboard the [USS] *WIDGEON* [ASR-1] and went through training for a diver, salvage diver.

CC: And you, one of your assignments then was to, first one, was to work on the *ARIZONA*?

JG: That was the first one, yes.

CC: What was that like? What kinds of things did you have to do?

JG: Well, we took out the ammunition, because it was going to be reworked and used, and took out gas masks and anything of any value. And they told us go to a certain compartment to check on it. And at one time, we even tunneled out of the ship to check the keel, see if the keel was broken. Because they had plans on raising in the *ARIZONA*. Then they found out they didn't know if the keel

was broken, they had to have something to anchor the patch if they had to put a patch on it.

CC: And what'd you find?

JG: Well, the keel was broken in two places.

CC: So it wasn't really feasible.

JG: So they cancelled her. And they figured it cost 4,000,000 dollars at that time to, hell, you know, to raise it.

CC: What were the conditions, what was the condition in the water when you would go down? Was there a lot of oil and debris?

JG: Lot of oil and debris and stuff floating around inside the compartments.

CC: Yeah. And what . . .

(Conversation off-mike.)

CC: Okay.

(Taping stops, then resumes)

CC: Let's go . . .

(Conversation off-mike.)

CC: Yeah, okay. Why don't we do that? Why don't we go back to the day of the attack a little bit and Yeah, did you --- when you received the --- you got a call to battle stations, and how did that happen? Did it come over the usual system, or did just people . . .

JG: Over the old Klaxon.

CC: Klaxon? And you reported to your station.

JG: I climbed the ladder to my battle station.

CC: Could you see other people reporting to their stations at that time or . . .

JG: Well, in that old hamming room there, that's where they were going to, their stations, gun stations.

CC: How about the other turrets?

JG: Well, I seen men running to their turret, or manning their positions, right opposite ours.

CC: Did you ever get your gun into action?

JG: No, you can't fire a fourteen-inch gun at an aircraft. Twenty-two hundred pound or 1,200 pound shell.

CC: What about other guns on the ship? Any other guns ever get into action?

JG: I didn't hear it, 'cause I was inside the turret.

CC: You wouldn't be able to?

JG: I wouldn't be able to hear it.

CC: Did you observe any of the damage forward, or any of that?

JG: I didn't see that 'til I left the ship, when I was on Ford Island.

CC: So basically, you just weren't able to really ascertain what the status was?

JG: I found that out when I was on the Ford Island, then when I was on the *TENNESSEE*. 'Cause on the *TENNESSEE*, they had the screws, four screws turning to agitate the water, due to the fact the heat was so intense, coming from the *ARIZONA*, because they were afraid their magazine was going to explode. That's why they flooded it.

CC: So the water surrounding the *TENNESSEE* was -- why were they agitating it now?

JG: To cool the water, keep the water cool.

CC: The water was that hot from the fire?

JG: Yes. Even though -- that's what they claim -- if they didn't flood it, the ship might explode, the magazines.

CC: Later, when you got into the salvage work, what would the process be if you were trying to salvage the ammunition and what was that like? How would you do it, physically? One guy would go down, or would there be a team? Or just could you describe the process you would go through?

JG: Well, when we first started, one guy would go down but we always sent another guy down with him after one diver lost his life, then we always sent two down. And we'd bring it back to the opening, that raise up to the outside, overhead, hoist it up, lift it up. Sometimes you gotta use the chain fall to raise it. And sometimes we used the crane to pull it up.

CC: Now, when you say a diver lost his life, that wasn't on the *ARIZONA*, though?

JG: No, that was on the *UTAH*.

CC: And you were --- did you get involved in salvage on the *UTAH* as well?

JG: I dove several times on the *UTAH*.

CC: Same --- what kinds of things did you do there, same things?

JG: Well, no, I was told to inspect, to check a room or compartment.

CC: And what did you find?

JG: Well, this was empty or nobody knew it was flooded.

CC: Did you try to retrieve bodies of people who were killed?

JG: No, that time, the Navy did not wear dog tags, so we had no way of identifying and the medical records were destroyed one day after the explosion. While diving in the *ARIZONA*, I was walking around in a compartment and air from my helmet, would cause a whirlpool, and a body would bump against my arm. And I pushed it away. But after months and months, they had the flesh decomposed and there's nothing left but bones. They'd be on the deck.

CC: It must have been a pretty amazing experience to do that.

JG: Kind of spooky. Couldn't see the nose in front of you underwater, inside the ship. In fact, we used lamps. And if you wanted to see anything closer, you'd have to put the lamp about six to eight inches from what you were looking at. The lamps weren't really well or effective at that time, for underwater use.

CC: So basically, sort of groping on . . .

JG: Yeah, all done by feel.

CC: Do you have any other specific questions about salvage operations that you might want to match with some of the things you have pictures of already?

(Taping stops, then resumes)

CC: So evidently the Park Service has a lot of documentation of the salvage work and so we're trying to get descriptions from people who were actually involved, so that when we show people the pictures and things, you can get a better understanding of what . . .

JG: Well, we had to dive in the channel. We had to dive --- any high projections sticking up so in case the ship wouldn't hit it when it went over that part. Because at the widest part of the *OKLAHOMA*, I dove on. There's nothing --- we dove on and the fire was there, that came from the *ARIZONA*. That was from the *OKLAHOMA* that we checked the channel.

CC: But, in terms of the superstructure of the *ARIZONA*, did you have to help remove that or . . .

JG: No. No. I had nothing to do with the superstructure. We went aboard the third day and see -- no, wait, when was it? They said a bomb went down the stack in reading books. The screen on top the stack was still intact. There's no holes in the side of the stack, so the bomb did not go down the stack. In fact, I talked to -- who's that, Wentworth -- in 1962 at the dedication. And I think, a guy by the name of Baum was the narrator on that memorial, and that was what their talk was to the public, that the bomb went down the stack and they changed it. They didn't say that the bomb went down the stack.

Jake Pacitti and I, we volunteered together as divers. He was my gun captain, I was his trade man. We went and saw this -- I think his name was Wentworth, that time, '62.

CC: Yeah.

JG: Commandant, was it, commander or

(Conversation off-mike.)

CC: Yeah, maybe you could say what parts of the ship you actually were diving on when you were diving on the *ARIZONA*.

JG: Well, we did some diving. We opened a turret, turret two, that picture you have in that book out there shows that some attended that too. And we went inside and we cut into one side of the turret, where the powder man pushed through the door to the gun, and all we found in the turret two was ashes. I assume that they were human ashes.

CC: That's all that was left.

JG: That's all that was left, yes.

CC: Any other parts of the ship you remember diving on?

JG: Well, we go down to see where turret one was. We supposedly dropped twenty feet. We just dove on this, just to go take a look. That's all we did on it.

CC: What did you find there?

JG: That the turret was where it was supposed to be. In fact, I saw a picture somebody brought back when we were out here that they had a drawing where this -- must be a big hole up there, on the *ARIZONA*. I think they have a survey report of that available?

CC: I don't know, maybe . . .

JG: I'm kind of curious of how that And we had a report that the ship was falling apart at one armor plate section, was supposed to have broke loose from the ship.

CC: You didn't observe that, though, when you were diving?

JG: No. No, I read that in the paper.

CC: Maybe it's happened since. I want to get back to something a little different that goes back to before the attack. One of the things that's been mentioned, of course, is the *ARIZONA*'s band had been in a . . .

JG: Had a band . . .

CC: . . . had a contest the night before.

JG: Best band in the fleet.

CC: Were you part --- did you observe that . . .

JG: No, I didn't go to that one. I just went by their record, the best band in the fleet.

CC: And what kinds of things would you have done that day if there hadn't been an attack? What kinds of things would you ordinarily have done on a Sun-- what were you looking forward to doing that Sunday?

JG: Well, that's why I was sitting on my cot, I was just trying to figure out what to do. I had the watch, 'cause I already stood the twelve to four watch, so I was on the fort watch, and then fort watch had the duty that day, so I had to stay aboard ship. So I just was sitting there and debating what to do.

CC: What was Sunday duty usually like?

JG: Day of leisure.

CC: And . . .

JG: You'd have to watch, you can't go on liberty.

CC: But what kinds of things would you do on board?

JG: Oh, play acey-deucey or poker. It was the right place to have a poker game.

CC: And were some of your shipmates getting ready to go on liberty at the same time?

JG: Mm hm.

CC: Did you spend the --- did you, in terms of your later duty in the war, as in the salvage work, did you spend all of it based in Pearl, or did you get out in the rest of the Pacific theater?

JG: I left Pearl Harbor in December of '43 and went to Washington D.C. and qualified as a deep sea diver. I was a salvage diver in Pearl. I could only dive up to ninety feet. I couldn't dive lower than ninety feet. So Jake Pacitti, who was sort of my buddy, he also went to deep sea diving school. But he stayed there, in experimental. I qualified as deep sea diver and I put in for the east coast. Naturally in the Navy, you put in for something, you get the opposite, so they sent me off to the Philippines. I was out in the Philippines.

CC: When you look back at it all from forty-five year vantage point, how do you feel about the whole incident?

JG: I don't get it. I mean, how I feel about it? You mean . . .

CC: Well, how do you think about it? I mean, do you put it in any different perspective now as you look back?

JG: Oh yeah. I can put in two or three of 'em now, when I read the books and read papers on it.

CC: Yeah. Well, what's changed in the way you think about it? Have you changed the way you think about that?

JG: Yeah. Especially when I see, look at the economy today. I hate to say this to people but, like, I wouldn't buy a Japanese car. And I've argued with several neighbors that have had Japanese cars, and I told him, "While you're doing that, directly or indirectly, you're shafting your parents, or your brothers, or sister, your friends, of employment." They don't -- none of them would say anything about it, they didn't want to argue.

CC: How about young people? Do you think young people have any understanding of what you went through in that?

JG: No, I don't think. They, they don't care what happens. Some people don't even know there's a December 7, 1941.

CC: When you run across somebody like that, how does that make you feel?

JG: Well, I can't blame them because of their age, you know. I remember when I got out of the service, my dad was in World War I, and he never did talk much about it or say anything. I think it's a little different now, due to the economy, the way the economy's going. I watched a movie the other night about these Japs on the west coast and they put 'em in the internment camps. And I say, well, that's tough luck. I said, "That's war. That was war." You want to give 'em \$60,000 apiece, reparation, pay money? And people out here screaming about Nagasaki, if they hadn't dropped a bomb on Pearl Harbor, there wouldn't have been no Nagasaki or Hiroshima. I guess a lot of people lost their lives over there in two atomic bombs.

CC: So that's, you see that as part of what war means?

JG: That's war. People suffer.

CC: Okay.

JG: I know a lot of guys even in the latter part of the war, they got killed, due to the fact of the kamikaze attacks. Bunch of fanatics to use suicide, it's crazy.

CC: Okay. Do you have any other . . .

(Conversation off-mike.)

CC: Okay, that's great. Good, very good. You've been very helpful.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

CC: Okay, so starting on the left of that picture, who's that handsome character standing up?

JG: Oh, that's supposed to me. I'm tending a diver, and I believe it was either Jake Pacitti, or Dover. I don't --- forgot his first name.

CC: And then the next fellow?

JG: And the one in the far, in the flesh suit is Oliphant. I forgot his first name. I remember Oliphant.

CC: And the other two, then?

JG: The other two, he was a gunnery officer, but he wasn't aboard the ship at the time. He was in charge of the diving operation.

CC: And where is this?

JG: This is on the top of turret two.

CC: And what are you trying to ascertain here at this time?

JG: Well, we wanted to see what was inside, if there was anything. No, I wasn't trying to find any rings or jewelry, or watches, but it was all metal.

CC: And you said you found basically that full of ashes.

JG: Ashes, probably human ashes.

CC: Let me ask you this, you told me a story before when you were diving, you went back to your old locker. Tell me that one.

JG: Well, we were taking out the ammunition in the hamming room there, and my locker was -- I knew where my locker was -- so I went to it and I pried it open with a crowbar, 'cause I didn't have a key. And I took out my clothes and they just fell apart. I found my electric razor and it was no good, so I just tossed it aside. And then I looked in my wallet, it had a five dollar bill. And I can't remember if I got paid shortly before then, but I -- during them days, you usually borrowed five dollars, and that dollar could be worth ten dollars, could be worth seven dollars, 'cause I borrowed it and had to pay ten dollars back for a five dollar bill to go on liberty. So I still got the five dollar bill.

CC: Oh, I see, so you'd have to give ten for five?

JG: Yeah, ten-something. Yeah, if I wanted to go to shore bad enough, I had, I knew a guy who I could get it, and sometimes he'd charge me six, sometimes he'd charge me seven. It was as high as ten sometimes for a five dollar bill. You wanted to go ashore, you wanted to go ashore. You want to get it.

CC: What kinds of things would you do when you got to shore? What was a good liberty? What was a good time?

JG: Good liberty? Well, liberty wasn't too good out there in them days. Not then. Why? I didn't drink, I didn't smoke. This was before Pearl Harbor. And even after the war started, they were pretty strict on -- you had to be twenty-one years of age to drink out here.

CC: So all these myths about sailors having a great time in the . . .

JG: No, not necessarily so in Hawaii at that time.

CC: But the war got you started drinking and smoking, is that . . .

JG: Oh yeah, it -- I would say I was so scared on December 7, in the afternoon, that I started smoking.

CC: How long did you keep that up?

JG: Well, forty-five years today, or well, this Sunday, forty-five years exactly.

CC: Take a drink occasionally now?

JG: Always drink, yeah, always had a drink.

--: Could you read the caption, Chris, out loud?

CC: Okay. This slate? Divers emerge from water-filled compartments of USS *ARIZONA* in May 1943. Some salvage work was done, but it was considered too dangerous to try and recover the bodies of the men who went down with the ship, the US Navy.

END OF INTERVIEW